

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

Wendt Beach is a unique park within the Erie County system. It is on the Lake, and yet is not a natural sand beach. Given its size, Wendt beach has become more of a multi-purpose recreation area, with its picnic areas, and numerous soccer fields. Specific features include:

- *Stony surfaced swimming beach.*
- *Historic Wendt Mansion*
- *Superintendent's Residence*
- *Office*
- *Maintenance garage*
- *Storage Building*
- *Concession Building*
- *Life Guard Cabin (Old Log Cabin)*
- *Bath House / restrooms (Old Horse Stables)*
- *Pump House*
- *Play equipment*
- *Baseball diamond*
- *Pedestrian bridge between the mansion and lifeguard station*

3.4 WENDT BEACH PARK

DESCRIPTION

Wendt Beach is a 178-acre, multi-purpose park with both beach-related, passive activities and active recreational offerings. The featured attractions at the park are the historic Wendt Mansion, the stony beach (non sand) and vegetated bluff and the numerous soccer fields. The park has two distinct characters; one is the expanse of mowed soccer fields and open lawns you see upon entering at the western edge of the park; the other is the more natural “heritage” setting near the lake, with the historic mansion, outbuildings, natural shoreline and large wooded areas. Both appear to serve different user types and activities. A park roadway bisects the park through the center from east to west.

Just inland from the south end of the beach the park includes a forested wetland area with protected plant species such as Trillium. Roughly half the park is forested, mostly on the south side. A bluff approximately 15 feet high runs the entire inland edge of the beach

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

The Wendt beach property has a long and storied history. The Park sits on the old estate of Henry W. Wendt, Jr., which the family later renamed “The Ridgewood.” The existing historic Wendt Mansion, with outbuildings and old stable structure, is reminiscent of an earlier era of influence, when the wealthy families of Buffalo recreated along the lakeshore during the summer months. The structure was built in the 1800s along the top of the dune and later moved to its current location. The interior of the main house is a remembrance of beautiful hardwood floors, a spiral staircase and railings of dark wood, window seats and bay windows, many of which overlook the lake and beach areas.

Some of the outbuildings also were part of the earlier estate. This includes the log cabin (once a playhouse and guest house), a caretaker’s cottage, a garage with chauffeur’s quarters, horse stables (now public restrooms), and the old pump house, where water brought in from the Lake was stored in a large tank and pumped through pipes to outside spigots for watering the gardens.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Located in the Town of Evans approximately 20 miles south of Downtown Buffalo, Wendt beach is less than one mile north of Bennett Beach and is accessible via Old Lakeshore Road. The Wendt Beach property marks a transition point along Old Lakeshore Road where the larger properties and estates to the north towards Sturgeon Point and beyond transitions to the smaller seasonal “cottage” properties to the south towards the center of Evans and hamlet of Lake Erie Beach. In general, most of the area is rural in character.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

Wendt Beach has a distinct and historic mansion setting, which overlooks a stony beach (non-sand). One must drive through a wide-open field area that is used for the local soccer clubs.

Bennett Beach Park is another County-owned passive-oriented park, offering no structured playing fields or courts one mile to the south of Wendt Beach.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- *The Mansion is in need of extensive updating and repair if it is to be fully useable and “marketable.”*
- *The maintenance facility location detracts from the “Heritage” setting around the mansion.*
- *There is no appropriate “gateway” feature for such a beautiful park setting.*
- *The entrance to the park (through the mowed athletic fields) gives no idea that this is actually a “beach” park.*
- *The parking lot near the beach is in very poor condition*
- *The newer concession building is out of character from the beautiful beach and heritage setting.*

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Restore the historic Wendt Mansion. This is a very important “heritage” area within the County parks System. Identify potential adaptive re-use that compliments the park uses.*
 - Secure National Register of Historic Places status for the house and setting.
 - Potential uses include and Inn/Bed & Breakfast similar to the Glen-Iris Inn at Letchworth State Park; a wedding/conference facility, restaurant or tea room, meeting

NEARBY PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES

(WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)

Town of Evans:

- Ayer-Stevenson Wildlife Sanctuary
A 20-acre wildlife sanctuary
- Evans Town Park
A resident-only beach park
- Lake Erie Beach Park
- Sturgeon Point Marina
Town owned and operated marina

Village of Angola:

- Point Breeze Campground
A private marina with camp sites
- Angola Rollercoade

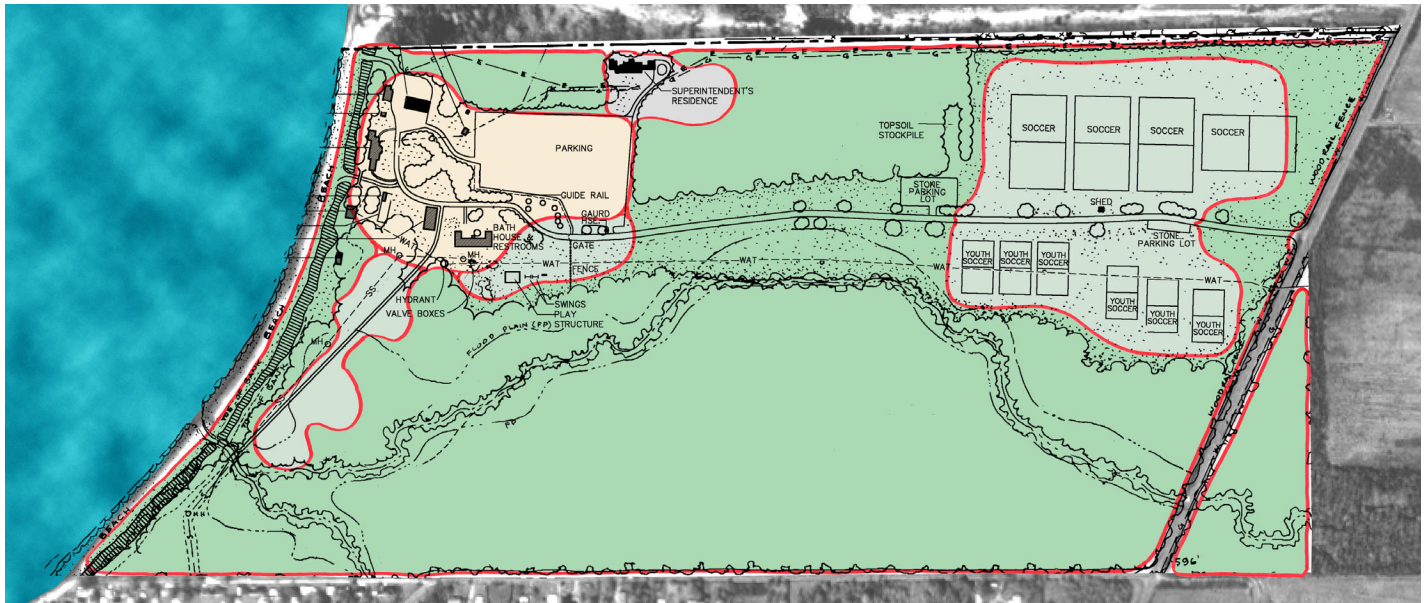
Town of Hanover:

- Evangola State Park
A 733-acre state park with beach access

- facility, etc;
 - Consider a public/private partnership when redeveloping this historic structure.
 - Develop / restore a gracious landscape setting around the historic mansion with formal lawn, gardens, strolling paths, tree lined entrance road;
 - Similar to the Emery Inn, the entire structure should be decorated with “period” furnishings. This authentic restoration could provide a “museum-like” setting, with photos and documents of the park’s history, the earlier history of the Wendt Homestead and Farm, etc. A small gift shop could be provided to sell local park-related items, historical maps, etc.
- *Relocate maintenance facility away from historic mansion and to a more inconspicuous spot adjacent to the superintendent’s house (off the back of the parking lot);*
- *Reorganize roadway and pedestrian zones to separate future “mansion” functions from public beach area;*
- *Horses have always played a big role in the history of the Wendt Estate, and the plan recommends restoring / rehabilitating the old horse stables (current concessions) into a historically accurate horse stables again which “looks” and “feels” like it is once again a part of the Mansion setting.*
 - In addition, horse trails should be developed throughout the natural wooded areas.
 - Overnight accommodations at the Mansion would make Wendt a potential magnet for equestrian related tourists.
- *In addition to the horse stables, retain and restore other minor structures related historically to the main house, i.e. pump house, etc.*
- *Maintain the location of the Log Cabin /Lifeguard station. This facility could be renovated for a more maximized use to include a meeting room (for environmental and historic related discussions, etc.)*
- *Develop west side of park as passive beach zone, i.e. picnicking, beachcombing. Introduce small parking/ picnic areas south of the mansion along the driveway, with turn-around loop; relocate current boat storage to a more inconspicuous location, still allowing for easy access to the beach.*
 - Introduce Volleyball Courts (sand and grass) and other beach-related activities into the overall recreational mix at Wendt Beach

- Upgrade the east side of Wendt Park to include more formalized, “structured” parking opportunities (stone or asphalt lots) and a support facility (i.e. permanent restrooms, concessions) for the very large soccer crowds.
- Enhance park entrance and identity at Old Lakeshore Road, with entrance feature. Provide a distinct transition zone between the two park sections and distinctive entrance to the heritage area of the site, i.e. possibly establish a secondary entrance feature past the soccer fields which would lead people towards the historic mansion and lake;
- Undertake dune restoration; although Wendt Beach is actually a very rocky beach, it still has a use and charm that is attractive to the masses.
- Enhance the opportunities for winter activities at Wendt beach, including the perfect setting for numerous cross-country ski trails, etc.
- Provide new interpretive signage and informational kiosks that tie the park better “into the mix” with other local cultural and historical attractions.
 - Provide an interpretive “story-line” for the Park’s local history, i.e. How and when the property was first developed?; When was the area first settled?; What’s the history behind the Wendt mansion and the farm structures? Did Lakeshore Road once pass through the site near the dune area?; Was there a polo field on the site?; What were some significant historic happenings in the area, or in the park?; etc.
- Consider a “Corporate Sponsorship” program which encourages local businesses from getting more involved with the Park, including sponsoring certain events, restoring older facilities and park features, setting up an interpretive signage program, etc.
- Reduce lawn mowing to provide more natural setting in non-use, little-trafficked areas, and help to shift park maintenance towards other tasks.
- Provide new native tree plantings throughout the park, particularly along the parking area and along Old Lakeshore Road.
- Provide bicycle access through the site as part of the overall lakefront recreational trail system.

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Legend

- Nature Reserve Zone
- Recreation Zone
- Heritage Zone
- Service Zone
- Zone Boundary

Nature Reserve Zones

Includes significant natural features or areas that require management to ensure the long-term protection of the natural heritage, i.e. woodlands, wetlands, natural open space areas (meadows), waterways, ravines, gorges and escarpment faces, steep slopes, etc.

Recreation Zones (Active and Passive)

Includes the 'maintained' landscape areas of the parks in which facilities development is permitted to support low to moderate intensity recreation activities, i.e. sports fields, specialized activities, picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, etc.

Heritage Zones

Includes areas of significant cultural heritage or archaeological features that require management to ensure the preservation of these important heritage assets.

Service Zones

Includes maintenance and service areas for the developed parks, as well as access points or staging areas within the Conservation Parks (e.g. trailheads and parking lots) where minimal use facilities are needed to support allowable uses within the Nature Reserve Zone.



Wendt Beach Park MANAGEMENT ZONES

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

- S Short Term *(1 - 3 years)*
- M Mid Term *(4 - 10 years)*
- L Long Term *(11 - 20+ years)*
- O Ongoing *(Continuing Efforts each year)*